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Podcasting as a Dissemination Method for a Researcher-Practitioner Partnership

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Abstract

Researcher-practitioner partnerships (RPPs) present opportunities to conduct studies that support evidence-based decision-making for participating school districts. Doing this work effectively requires ongoing input from key stakeholders, attention to the local impact of the research, and targeted dissemination to audiences who can benefit from the findings. Maximizing research use in public education requires attention to how it is communicated to decision-makers. The present case study of a podcast used as a dissemination method by a metropolitan RPP explores how it potentially supported the goals of the partnership and promoted stakeholder engagement with research findings. Theoretical and practical implications for RPPs are discussed, as well as implications for the literature on research use and podcasting as a communication tool in education.

Keywords Dissemination; Podcasting; Researcher-practitioner partnerships

Introduction

Educational research has the potential to inform school- and district-level decision-making to the benefit of educators, students, families, and communities. Two key

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considerations in promoting the use of educational research include the strength of networks between universities and school district partners and the methods used to communicate findings. While research is traditionally shared through reports (often in academic journals), school district leaders and educational practitioners may not always have the bandwidth for in-depth engagement with the results. This may limit the potential for applying them to practice. Additionally, it may be beneficial to access takeaways throughout the duration of a study rather than waiting for the publication of a final report. This study explores the use of a podcast as a dissemination method for a researcher-practitioner partnership (RPP). Using a quantitative case study design examining stakeholder survey and podcast access data, this article investigates the potential benefits and limitations of using this dissemination method by a mid-Atlantic RPP with seven school district partners.

Three RPP goals align with the purpose of the podcast: 1) to conduct and disseminate community-engaged research that has direct and indirect impacts on critical youth, school, and community outcomes, 2) to build community and social networks between university units, school districts, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners, and 3) to contribute to the local, state, and national policy and scholarly dialogue on education. With these goals in mind, this study explores three research questions about how the podcast potentially supports the work of the RPP:

Research Question 1: Does the podcast help RPP stakeholders to engage with its research?

Research Question 2: Does the podcast strengthen relationships and networks within the RPP?

Research Question 3: Does the podcast support the expansion of the audience within and beyond the RPP to engage with its research?

“Stakeholders” in this case refers to the various individuals invested in advancing public schools at the university or partnering school districts in the RPP. In launching this podcast, the RPP sought to readily engage local audiences and join broader conversations about issues in public Pre-Kindergarten to Grade (PK-12) education.

Literature review

Effective school improvement requires the thoughtful application of research. RPPs provide structures whereby stakeholders from public PK-12 education and academic scholarship collaborate on addressing key issues facing schools (Penuel, Coburn, & Gallagher, 2013). Increasingly, funders of educational research initiatives have recognized the value of these partnerships (Chambers & Azrin, 2013; Goldstein, McKenna, Barker, & Brown, 2019; Snow, 2014). This is perhaps attributable to the potential for conducting meaningful, impact-oriented research in partnership with practitioners well positioned to implement it. As Howard Goldstein, Meghan McKenna, Robert Barker, and Tracie Brown (2019) reflected, RPPs do not simply translate research into practice but instead facilitate trusting and productive partnerships between researchers and practitioners, leading to research objectives that align with the priorities of public educators, students, and researchers alike.

RPPs often share essential elements that justify and maintain their existence, as well as some common challenges. Key foundational principals to RPPs include building and maintaining trusting relationships; conducting rigorous, informative research; supporting the strategic goals and building the research capacity of partnering organizations; and generating knowledge that can inform improvements in educational practices and outcomes (Henrick, Briggs, Davidson, Herlihy, Hill, Farrell, & Allen, 2017). Common challenges facing RPPs include honoring the priorities and perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups and effectively communicating and implementing research findings in a practitioner setting (Goldstein et al., 2019). Ideally, RPPs are long-standing, trusting partnerships with an ongoing commitment to conducting relevant research with strong potential to inform policies and practices that positively impact students and educators. In order to meet this standard, it is important to incorporate accessible dissemination methods that promote research use.

For more than 25 years, the RPP featured in this article has served local school districts in a mid-Atlantic metropolitan area. The information-dissemination methods for these studies have previously included research briefs shared with the planning committee and summative research reports available through the partnership website, which is publicly accessible. While these methods have made findings available to school districts and the broader public in written format, the partnership recently sought to find new and engaging ways to share updates throughout research studies. As a part of this expanded dissemination effort, the RPP launched a new podcast in 2017. The following quantitative case study of this podcast discusses the rationale for this dissemination method as it aligns with the goals and principles of the RPP, as well outcomes from its first three years of existence. To set the groundwork for establishing this case study, it is necessary to understand the structure and purpose of RPPs, outline common assumptions of research use in public education, and explore existing empirical evidence of the apparent benefits of podcasting in education.

Research dissemination and use

A key element of an effective RPP is its ability to disseminate research findings to its partnering stakeholders in a form that is accessible and able to inform their practice (Penuel, Allen, Coburn, & Farrell, 2015). This begins with identifying research topics that are of interest to partnering school districts to promote findings that are relevant to practitioner needs (Goldstein et al., 2019). Often, dissemination within an RPP involves written research reports, although this is increasingly occurring through online media platforms (Voithofer, 2005). There is growing scholarship around research use in education, with researchers studying the extent and purpose of research implementation in schools as well as attitudes by practitioners and policymakers toward research-based information (for an in-depth literature review on research use in education, see Dagenais, Lysenko, Abrami, Bernard, Ramde, & Janosz, 2012). Understanding how educational practitioners utilize research is of the utmost importance to RPPs, which must remain mindful of how research is disseminated and maximize its potential usage by key stakeholders.

Furthermore, RPPs should consider the assumptions about research use put forth in the conceptual framework by Elizabeth Farley-Ripple, Henry May, Allison Karpyn, Katherine Tilley, and Kalyn McDonough (2018) outlining the connections between educational research and practice. The first assumption is that the basis of educational decision-making should be research. RPPs are based on a shared belief that collaboratively conceived and executed research has the potential for informing educational practice and impacting educator and student outcomes. The second assumption is that there is a clear relationship between research and practice, and that research can be interpreted differently in different contexts. RPPs must remain attuned to the contexts they serve, recognizing that findings will be understood, valued, and implemented differently by various stakeholder groups. The third assumption is that the definition of research “use” is inconsistent in education, as decision-makers for school districts may use research to resolve a discrete problem or gradually reorient their thinking. The authors (Farley-Ripple et al., 2018) further advocate that making research “usable” often requires additional resources and efforts toward dissemination. Following this logic, RPPs should consider creative and accessible methods for disseminating findings to their members. Podcasting presents such an opportunity.

Podcasting

Podcasts are digital audio programs focused on various topics. They are typically available for free download, and they are becoming increasingly popular as a way to consume information. In 2008, there were approximately 20,000 podcasts on iTunes (Morgan, 2015). By 2013, Apple estimated that there were approximately 250,000 podcasts in over 100 languages with over eight million published episodes and more than a billion subscribers (Friedman, 2013). In 2008, roughly nine percent of U.S. citizens over the age of 12 reported listening to a podcast in the previous month. By 2016, that number grew to 21 percent (Vogt, 2016). While higher education was among the top-20 most popular podcast topics in 2015, issues in public PK–12 education were not (Morgan, 2015).

Research on podcast use in education most commonly focuses on its use for facilitating student learning. Mohammad Merhi (2015) found in a survey of over 300 college students that the use of podcasting in their classes tended to be associated with higher self-efficacy and students often considered them to be advantageous to their learning. Doris Bolliger, Supawan Supanakorn, and Christine Boggs (2010) found that the use of podcasting by college students was positively associated with their scores on all four subscales of the Instructional Materials Motivation Survey (attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction). Khe Foon Hew (2009) found that students perceived it to be beneficial when their professors provided lectures in podcast format and indicated that their likelihood of attending class did not diminish when gaining access to audio recordings. Collectively, these studies suggest that podcasts can serve as a useful tool for promoting learning.

Brent Thoma, Heather Murray, Simon Huang, William Milne, Lynsey Martin, Christopher Bond, Rohit Mohindra, Alvin Chin, Calvin Yeh, William Sanderson, and Teresa Chan (2018) offered a rare look into the use of podcasting in promoting re-

search access and readership. The authors studied articles in the *Canadian Journal of Emergency Medicine* that received promotion through podcasts or infographics compared to a control group of articles that received no promotion. They measured readership using Almetric scores for each of the articles and found that articles promoted using a podcast had higher readership than those promoted by infographics or not at all. In a literature review on the use of podcasting in education, Simon Heilesen (2010) found that while there is a lack of research on the impact of podcasting on student learning, there does seem to be extensive evidence that students find this medium to be a helpful supplement to their studies. Taken together, this evidence suggests that podcasts have the potential for facilitating access to information and stimulating interest, but that there is still opportunity to better understand how they impact the listener's understanding of the content. The case study presented herein explores how a metropolitan RPP introduced podcasting into its dissemination efforts in 2017, how this contributed to growth in the RPP, and how key stakeholders perceived the value of the podcast in aiding their access to and understanding of research findings.

Case study RPP and podcast

The RPP discussed in this case study is a decades-long collaboration between a mid-Atlantic urban university school of education and seven school districts in the surrounding metropolitan area. Most RPPs involve a partnership between a university and a single agency, such as one large school district (Goldstein et al., 2019). Prominent examples include the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research, the Research Alliance for New York City Schools, and the Baltimore Educational Research Consortium. While the RPP featured in this case study serves fewer total students and educators on average than these large consortia, it experiences a somewhat unique challenge of brokering relationships with seven different school districts across urban, rural, and suburban contexts.

Goldstein et al. (2019) outlined several challenges that RPPs often encounter, including maintaining positive relationships, navigating differences between practitioners and researchers, combatting perceptions of the partnership activities being burdensome, and producing research overlooking the realities of public education settings. The RPP profiled here works to overcome these challenges through the collaborative selection of its studies, the composition of its study teams, and the methods by which it disseminates findings. A leadership council comprised of superintendents, research directors, and other school district leaders convenes quarterly to discuss issues of interest and to vote on studies, ensuring that they are relevant to their needs. Studies are led by faculty from the university who serve as principal investigators and are supported by doctoral students who serve on the research team. Critically, these studies are also informed by study teams comprised of representatives from each of the seven member school districts who meet monthly to inform the research design, support data collection, help interpret findings, and vet recommendations to ensure that they are practical and actionable at the school level. According to Goldstein et al. (2019), RPPs must strike a balance between "practitioner knowledge and experience and evidence-based knowledge and expe-

rience resulting from research” (p. 41). The collaborative research approach of the RPP profiled here seeks to provide such a balance between research and practice.

Additionally, the RPP works to enhance relationships and lessen barriers to research use on participating school districts through multimodal dissemination efforts, including accessible reporting, an annual stakeholder conference, webinars, and a podcast. The RPP established a podcast in 2017 as a method for communicating take-aways from research throughout the duration of a study, but also as a space for continually connecting researchers and school district partners in productive dialogue. In this way, the podcast serves as a method of boundary crossing, defined by Wiliam Penuel, Anna-Ruth Allen, Cynthia Coburn, and Caitlin Farrell(2015) as transitions and interactions between researchers and educational practitioners into spaces where they may be unfamiliar. For example, this might include a researcher engaging with school district personnel to learn about their practices and better inform the potential recommendations they can make from educational research, or a school district leader partnering with a researcher on a manuscript or conference presentation. The case study podcast profiled in this article is built around the idea of providing opportunities for these types of productive interactions (or boundary crossings) to occur.

In its first three years, the podcast has featured roundtable discussions with members of research and study teams, individual interviews with various stakeholders in public PK–12 education, and a special series connected with the annual stakeholder conference profiling relevant initiatives in each of the member school districts. Roundtable discussions included brainstorming descriptions of the problem that the research is attempting to address, overviews of the literature and emerging research questions, data collection methodology, results and interim findings, conclusions, and future directions for RPP studies. Episodes have explored several critical issues, including racial disproportionality in exclusionary school discipline, designing responsive professional development for rapidly diversifying schools, college access, and teacher morale and retention. The content of these episodes reflects topics identified as important by leaders and practitioners in area school districts, aligning with studies conducted by the RPP.

Infrastructure and implementation

A researcher for the RPP spends approximately half a workday per week (10% effort) on podcast planning, communication, production, and dissemination. Recording occurs through two methods. The primary method is the use of an audio recording studio provided by the university at no additional cost to the RPP. This studio includes a soundproof space as well as access to professional microphones and recording equipment. The secondary method is a handheld recorder with attachable lapel microphones. This method is required when conducting interviews with participants at locations outside of the university. Because the production quality tends to be stronger through the primary method, the RPP typically requested that participants come to the university recording studio. Publishing podcast episodes for dissemination required a professional account with an online platform that provides a really simple syndication (RSS) feed, allowing for dissemination through multiple prominent podcast providers, including Soundcloud, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, and Spotify.

The total approximate annual cost for podcast implementation is \$10,000, 98 percent of which is allocated to faculty effort.

Dissemination

The RPP profiled in this study defines “dissemination” as any effort to communicate findings from its research projects executed in collaboration with local school districts. This includes research reports; national, state, and local conference presentations; an annual stakeholder conference hosted by the RPP; professional development workshops in partnering school districts; and a podcast. As discussed in Penuel et al. (2017), universities typically privilege peer-reviewed publication in research journals for the purposes of tenure, but in order to maximize the possibility of schools implementing those research findings, it is important to be mindful of how and where they are disseminated. Penuel et al. (2017) advocate that such efforts should be clear and “jargon-free” (p. 15) with a focus on implications for practice. This aligns with RPP rationale for disseminating findings through podcast episodes that frequently feature representatives from partnering school districts as well as researchers from the university. There is a persistent focus on translating research into practice, and the conversational nature of the episodes helps to reduce the potential for overusing research jargon. When such terms are introduced, there is an effort to clearly define them for the listener.

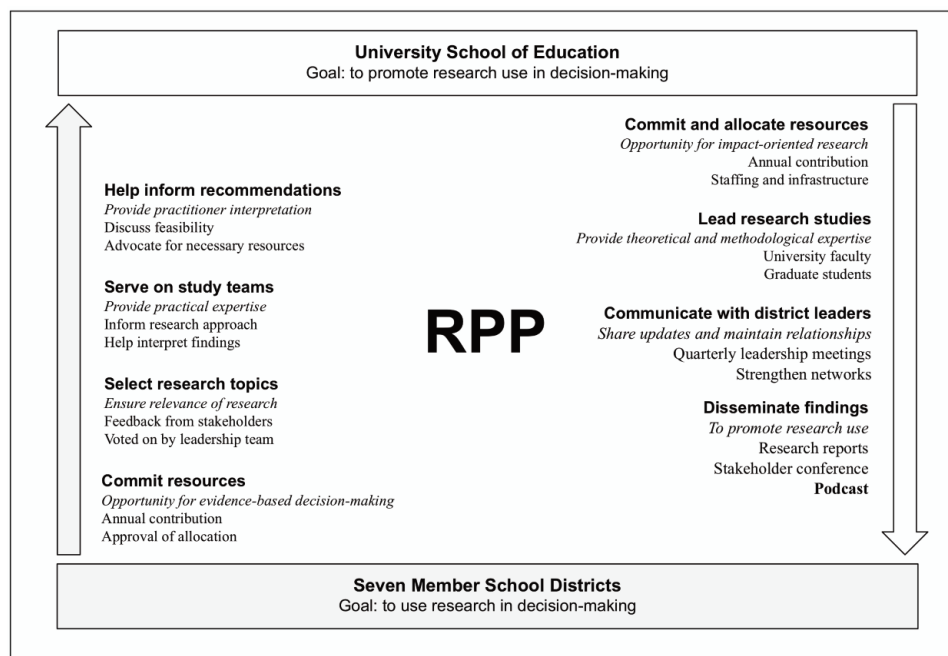
All episodes are published on Soundcloud with links embedded on the RPP website to drive traffic, with dissemination occurring primarily through MailChimp email campaigns and social media (Twitter and Facebook). By producing episodes aligning with RPP studies and engaging in member checking with all participants, the podcast is structured to provide relevant information that is relationally valid for member school districts (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) with the potential for influencing broader conversations on critical issues in public PK–12 education. The dissemination of the episodes through accessible channels such as email and social media enhances the potential for promoting these discussions.

Conceptual framework

The preceding literature and the structure of the profiled RPP inform the conceptual framework for this study, which centrally seeks to understand how the implementation of a podcast for research dissemination was associated with promoting research use in educational decision-making and strengthening the networks of the RPP. Figure 1 represents how the RPP profiled in this study works to facilitate a symbiotic system that maximizes the potential for generating research that has a positive impact on school and youth outcomes. This framework is informed by the approach the case study RPP developed over time for establishing and maintaining relationships with school district partners, identifying relevant research topics, executing studies, and disseminating findings. The model seeks to address the typical challenges that RPPs experience outlined by Goldstein et al. (2019), including the mutual commitment of resources to help establish trust, stakeholder input in selecting study topics to ensure the relevance of the research, and minimizing the burden of effectively engaging with the findings through multiple dissemination efforts. This includes a podcast, which also serves as

a potential space for boundary crossing within the RPP (Penuel et al., 2015), along with other efforts to directly connect researchers and educational practitioners (e.g., study team meetings). These practices allow the system depicted in Figure 1 to work.

Figure 1: Conceptual model



Consistent with the purposes of RPPs outlined in the literature, stakeholders in the RPP profiled here have aligned, mutually beneficial goals (Henrick et al., 2017). School districts engage in the RPP to participate in research that could help inform their decision-making, and the university school of education engages in the RPP to promote research use in public education. Both the university and school districts alike decide to commit resources to this effort, recognizing the potential of the RPP to have a positive impact on educators and students through research. In addition to committing resources, member school districts support this effort by carefully selecting research topics of interest to their stakeholders, recommending study team members who help guide the research at every step, and informing the recommendations that emerge from the research to ensure that they are practical, actionable, and tied to appropriate resources for implementation. The university school of education strategically allocates the pooled resources of the RPP, identifies faculty and graduate students to help lead the research studies, engages in ongoing communication with district leaders to keep them informed about progress and to maintain trusting relationships, and disseminates findings through research reports and other methods.

Within this model, dissemination is a critical component of ensuring that research use in educational decision-making can occur. Studies that are conceived collaboratively with shared relevance in mind have the potential to offer more meaningful findings to practitioners, but if those findings are not communicated in accessible ways, they may be less likely to be incorporated into practice (Penuel et al., 2015). Podcasting has shown promise in the literature as a method of communicating information that is nimble, accessible, well-received by listeners, and has the potential for promoting learning (Heilesen, 2010). Research on the use of pod-

casting as a dissemination method for research findings is limited, meriting further study on how the podcast implemented by the RPP profiled herein supported the accessibility of relevant information to stakeholders.

The purpose of this case study is to explore the role that podcasting plays in advancing the goals of the RPP, which by extension advance the goals of the backbone university and member school districts. This study contributes to scholarship by offering an empirical exploration of how podcasting can promote research engagement from educational practitioners and decision-makers. Furthermore, it contributes to the practice of RPPs by offering practical guidance for how to establish and integrate a podcast into dissemination efforts and illuminate its reception and use by stakeholders.

Method

This research employed case study methodology to explore the implementation of a podcast as a dissemination method and its potential association with growth in the RPP. Case studies can be qualitative and/or quantitative, with the goal of offering a robust picture that helps the reader understand the “case” (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015), which is a podcast in the current study. They often employ multiple data sources to provide triangulating evidence in support of answering research questions and establishing validity in the findings (Shareia, 2016; Yin, 2017). The present study employed multiple data sources (secondary and primary) to answer research questions and explore how the introduction of a podcast as a dissemination method might be associated with the development of the RPP over two years. This section will explain the data sources utilized in this study and describe the participants in the podcast. It will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study as they inform interpretation of the findings.

Data

There were two types of data sources (primary and secondary) that offered evidence of how the podcast potentially supported the goals of the RPP. The primary data source was an annual survey disseminated to RPP stakeholders. This survey was developed by RPP personnel to evaluate how effectively it had served its mission in the previous year. It also featured multiple items related to the quality and relevance of the podcast content to the work of the stakeholder (Appendix A). Additionally, there were items asking specifically about the experiences of episode guests. In 2019, 297 potential respondents who were engaged with the RPP in the previous year (e.g., as a study team member, leadership council member, or conference attendee) received an invitation to complete the survey with a response rate of 27.9 percent (83 total responses). This included responses from stakeholders in all seven school districts. Stakeholders were asked if they had listened to or been featured in an episode of the podcast in the previous year, which was the case for 32 respondents (38.5%). Of those respondents, 10 were teachers, four were school administrators, six were central office personnel, four were superintendents or assistant superintendents, three were university faculty members, three were doctoral students, one was an undergraduate student, and one was a community advocate. All seven school districts were also represented in this sample of respondents.

Additionally, there were multiple sources of secondary data that offered evidence of potential impact. First, the number of plays across all platforms for each episode over three years was explored to indicate the level of interest in each topic as well as the overall popularity the podcast over time. Second, the location of each play was examined to indicate the reach of the podcast within and beyond the state of the RPP. Finally, the number of research report downloads from the RPP was explored as a point of comparison for research dissemination. Attendance at the annual conference of the RPP was also included as a supplemental secondary data source. Taken together, this collection of primary and secondary data informed the research questions and offered triangulating evidence regarding the use of the podcast as a dissemination method.

Participants

Podcast participants have included educational researchers, policymakers, teachers, administrators, superintendents, and students. They are purposefully selected by RPP personnel (often from study teams) to provide diverse viewpoints on the research topic featured in an episode, or a member school district recommends them to represent an initiative or illustrate a theme related to the annual RPP stakeholder conference. Consistent with qualitative research, member checking is a critical component of producing each podcast episode, as the RPP seeks to ensure a credible representation of partnering school districts (Guba, 1981). The audio for each episode goes through a round of internal peer review with RPP central staff before it is shared with participants for feedback and approval. Over three years, the podcast has featured 128 participants.

Limitations

While the evidence presented in this article included primary data from relevant stakeholders and secondary data related to podcast performance, it is still limited in supporting empirical claims related to the potential impact of this dissemination method. Because there was no experimental or quasi-experimental design, it was not possible to make directly causal claims about the impact of the podcast on desired RPP outcomes. Also, the stakeholder survey was not a previously validated measure, but rather a tool developed in house by the RPP for the purposes of evaluating its performance over the previous year. For the purposes of this study, this primarily poses a threat to external validity, as the results of the survey may not be directly generalizable to the work of similar RPPs. Additionally, the response rate was only 27.9 percent, meaning there could have been key perspectives from stakeholders not represented in the results. Furthermore, it could be true that those who responded to the survey were more likely to have a favorable view of the podcast. Similarly, because the author of this article was involved in the creation and production of this podcast, it is possible there is some bias in the interpretation of the findings. To help account for this, potential limitations of the podcast are included in the discussion of each research question alongside the evidence of its potential benefits. Finally, the design of this study does not allow for directly attributing the use of the podcast to stakeholder engagement in the RPP, the use of its research, or the strengthening of its network. Instead, the evidence presented herein offers insights about how this dissemination method might be related to recent growth in the RPP profiled in this case study.

This section will examine evidence about the potential effectiveness of the podcast related to the research questions by exploring its 1) accessibility as a dissemination method, 2) impact on strengthening networks within the RPP, and 3) contribution to an expanding audience of engaged stakeholders.

Accessible dissemination method

Evidence of the accessibility of the podcast as a dissemination method includes the number of plays per episode as well as stakeholder survey items related to the quality and relevance of the podcast. In its first three years, the podcast featured 61 episodes. Table 1 depicts the percentage increase in plays per episode over the first three years.

Table 1: Podcast episodes and plays 2017–2019

Year	Episodes	Plays	Plays per episode	% Increase in plays per episode from 2017
2017	30	3,166	105.3	–
2018	20	3,762	188.1	78.6%
2019	11	3,576	325.1	208.7%

This evidence suggests that while the podcast produced fewer episodes over time, it also became more accessible, as measured by plays per episode. Additionally, the increase in average plays per episode suggests the growth in popularity of the podcast over time. This is likely attributable to increased familiarity with the podcast as well as its dissemination through additional platforms. It was only available on Soundcloud and Apple Podcasts in 2017, but it expanded to Stitcher in 2018 and Spotify in 2019. To date, the podcast has had over 20,526 plays across all episodes.

By comparison, in 2018, the RPP released two research reports that were downloaded 269 times (134.5 downloads per report), and in 2019 the RPP released two research reports that were downloaded 289 times (144.5 downloads per report). This suggests that not only was the RPP able to release podcast episodes with greater frequency than research reports but that the episodes also received higher average engagement. As a direct comparison, there was one research report released in 2019 that had 141 downloads, while the accompanying podcast episode synthesizing the findings and promoting the report had 448 plays.

Table 2: Podcast quality and relevance

Survey item	% agree” or “strongly agree”*
<i>The topics covered in the podcast were relevant to my work or experiences in education.</i>	96.9
<i>The guests on the podcast were interesting and engaging</i>	100
<i>I learned something valuable from listening to the podcast.</i>	93.8
<i>The podcast sounded clear and professionally produced.</i>	96.9

Note: *n = 32

Survey data further suggests that respondents found the podcast to be an accessible method for exploring research topics conducted by the RPP. Table 2 depicts the percentage of participants reporting “agree” or “strongly agree” to these items.

These responses suggest that the majority of respondents held positive perceptions of the quality of the podcast, indicating that they learned valuable information about topics relevant to their work through a dissemination resource they perceived as being professionally produced. Additionally, of the nine respondents who indicated that they were a guest on the podcast in the previous year, 100 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they learned something valuable by participating in the podcast. Taken together, this evidence suggests that stakeholders increasingly listened to the podcast and that survey respondents found it to be a quality method for learning about the research topics explored by the RPP. While this is a positive indicator for how stakeholders engaged with the information provided in the podcast (including research findings), further research is needed to understand how stakeholders took what they learned from the episode and applied it to their own practice. Additionally, podcasts are limited in their ability to communicate findings with as much depth as research reports. Although stakeholders indicated that they learned something valuable about topics relevant to their work through listening, they would likely gain a deeper understanding of the content by reading reports of findings as well.

Strengthening relationships and networks within the RPP

Two of the foundational principles of the RPP are building relationships and incorporating multiple perspectives. Aligning with these principles, the RPP implemented the podcast as an ongoing opportunity to potentially strengthen connections between stakeholders in member school districts. Across 61 episodes of the podcast, there have been a total of 128 participants, and 98 percent of them were from the either the university or one of the seven school districts that comprise the RPP. Table 3 depicts the stakeholders included in the podcast in order from highest to lowest frequency. This distribution of participants indicates the variety of perspectives represented on the podcast: 77% of participants are educators, leaders, and students in member school districts.

Table 3: Podcast participants

Stakeholder group	Participants
Teachers and other school level personnel	49
K–12 students	27
Educational researchers	19
School district leaders	16
Undergraduate and graduate students	6
School-level administrators	6
Community advocates	4
Policymakers	1
Total	128

Roundtable discussion episodes featured conversations between stakeholders from the university and multiple member school districts about RPP research topics. This not only provided nuanced insights on these topics from the research, policy, and practice perspectives, it also helped strengthen the networks between RPP partners. In addition to roundtable discussions with members of research and study teams, the podcast has featured a special series each summer in connection with the annual conference of the RPP. For example, the 2017 conference theme focused on the state of public education in a shifting political climate, and the podcast series featured stakeholder conversations about the purposes, challenges, and future direction of public education. In 2018, the conference theme focused on the importance of relationships in public education, and the podcast series featured one story about an educator and student from each RPP school division illustrating this point. In 2019, the conference theme focused on advancing educational equity and the podcast series featured initiatives for equitably supporting students in member school districts. RPP personnel solicited recommendations for the 2018 and 2019 series and promoted participants' schools and districts in marketing for the episodes on the RPP website and social media. These series averaged 312 plays per episode. Participants were featured in special sessions at the conference, sharing clips from each episode to guide a panel discussion about the theme. Evaluation responses from conference attendees often indicated that they perceived these sessions to be the most meaningful part of the event.

Podcast participant perspectives are included throughout the planning, recording, and production of each episode. This includes offering participants the opportunity to provide suggestions for discussion questions and to preview the episode audio to offer feedback and request changes. Through these methods, RPP personnel are careful to ensure that the perspectives of participants and the school districts they represent are presented fairly and accurately. Stakeholder survey responses from podcast guests indicated that had a positive experience, as depicted in Table 4.

Table 4: Podcast participant experience survey items

Item	% "agree" or "strongly agree"*
<i>Communication about what to expect for our episode was clear.</i>	100
<i>My perspective was represented fairly in the episode.</i>	100
<i>I was provided the opportunity to give feedback on my episode.</i>	100
<i>I am glad I participated in the podcast.</i>	100

Note: *n = 9

Taken together, this evidence suggests that the podcast potentially helped to strengthen relationships within RPP school districts by intentionally representing each division and by valuing the input of participants throughout the production of each episode. The evaluated evidence, however, does not provide sufficient insight into how participants perceived the strength of their connection to the RPP or the university in relation to their engagement with the podcast. Further research is needed to directly make this connection. Furthermore, while the podcast is intended

as a space for boundary crossing, this perhaps applies more to episode participants than listeners. While listeners may feel a reinforced sense of connection with the RPP, there is not sufficient evidence to support that.

Expanded audience

Over the course of the podcast, its audience has expanded. In 2018, 30 percent of respondents indicated on the annual stakeholder survey that they had listened to the podcast. That number increased to 42.1 percent of respondents in 2019. Over those two years, the list of actively engaged stakeholders (defined as participating in at least one RPP research activity or event in the past year) also grew from 240 to 297 (an increase of 23.6%). Additionally, attendance at the annual conference grew from 167 attendees in 2017 to 229 in 2018 (an increase of 37.1%), which increased another 31 percent to 300 attendees in 2019. While this increased stakeholder engagement was not directly attributable to the podcast, the inclusion of the podcast as a primary method for research dissemination and conference promotion suggests that it potentially contributed to the growing stakeholder group.

Data on the location of episode plays also offered evidence of how the podcast potentially helped to grow the audience for the RPP. Table 5 depicts the average number of cities inside and outside of the home state of the RPP where listeners played episodes of the podcast.

Table 5: Podcast plays in cities inside and outside of the RPP home state

Year	Cities in the RPP state	Increase since 2017	Cities outside of the RPP State	Increase since 2017
2017	10	–	11.3	–
2018	12.8	28.0%	17.8	57.5%
2019	21	110%	20.9	85.0%

These data suggest that not only did the podcast help share research and information within and beyond the home state of the RPP but that its reach continues to grow. The average cities in the RPP state playing episodes produced in 2019 more than doubled from episodes produced in 2017, with cities outside of the RPP showing an 85 percent increase over that same time period. This indicates that the podcast helped to support the goal of the RPP to expand its reach and contribute to local, state, and national dialogue on critical issues in public, PK–12 education.

Stakeholder survey responses further exemplified how the podcast potentially helped expand the audience of the RPP, as depicted in Table 6.

Table 6: Podcast audience expansion survey items

Item	% “agree” or “strongly agree”*
<i>The podcast made me more familiar with the work of the RPP.</i>	93.8
<i>I would share the RPP podcast with friends and colleagues.</i>	93.8

Note: *n = 32

As one stakeholder reflected in the survey, the podcast has the potential to further share the work of the RPP, “The episodes are all relevant, engaging, and professional. I would like to see them shared with a broader scope of people for greater impact.” Taken together, the above evidence suggests that the podcast helped to share RPP research with an expanding audience, and it seems to have contributed to a growing number of engaged stakeholders and annual conference attendees.

There are two important limitations to these findings. First, while plays per episode in cities and states beyond the scope of the RPP may indicate broadening exposure to the content, this data does not necessarily indicate the degree to which these listeners became more familiar with the RPP or its research. More evidence is needed from these listeners to understand their reasons for engagement and their takeaways from the content. Second, although growth in podcast engagement coincided with growth in stakeholder conference attendance, it is possible that this attendance may be attributable to other promotional efforts or increased overall familiarity with the RPP in the community it serves. Further input is needed from conference registrants to understand how their engagement with the podcast contributed to their decision to attend. Finally, not all stakeholders who might attend a conference are necessarily interested in listening to a podcast, thus limiting its potential promotional impact for expanding attendance.

Discussion

The preceding evidence suggests that the podcast was potentially successful in supporting three goals of the RPP: to disseminate research with the goal of impacting critical outcomes for local educators and students; to build community and networks within the RPP; and to contribute to local, state, and national dialogues in public education. While future research is needed to identify the unique impact of podcasting as a research dissemination method, there are clear theoretical implications as well as practical implications for how this might inform the work of similar RPPs.

Theoretical implications

The findings from this study offer theoretical implications for the literature on RPPs, research use, and podcasting in education. Given the increasing interest in RPPs as potentially valuable mechanisms for promoting evidence-based decision-making in schools (Chambers & Azrin, 2013), it makes sense for RPPs to not only be innovative but also to conduct and share empirical research on their work methods to explore how effective they really are in accomplishing their goals. The findings from this case study suggest that experimenting with new dissemination methods, such as podcasting, can be potentially advantageous for RPPs as they seek to conduct and distribute impact-oriented research. The mission of RPPs is not only about translating research into practice but also about building trusting relationships based on conducting research that aligns with the priorities of educational researchers and practitioners alike (Goldstein et al., 2019). Considering this foundational principal, it makes sense to critically examine and provide evidence of how much RPPs are conducting and disseminating aligned research that strengthens their networks and informs their stakeholders. This case study contributes to that effort.

As one of their key foundational principals, RPPs should support the strategic goals of partnering school districts (Henrick et al., 2017). Findings from this study suggest that the podcast covered topics that were relevant to the work of partnering stakeholders, and that it was perhaps a more accessible form of interacting with RPP research findings than traditional research reports. This suggests that it may be well-suited for supporting the strategic goals of partnering school districts that may benefit from interacting with research in convenient ways. Future research in this area could explore the degree to which RPP stakeholders view alternative dissemination methods, such as podcasting, as informing their work compared to more traditional methods, such as research reports. Two common challenges of RPPs include honoring the perspectives of partnering stakeholders and effectively communicating research to practitioners (Goldstein et al., 2019). The findings of this study suggest that the podcast not only intentionally incorporated a variety of perspectives but that stakeholders felt as though their views were fairly represented. Survey results also suggest that stakeholders found the topics discussed in the podcast episodes to be relevant to their work and that they learned something valuable by listening, reinforcing a key element outlined by Penuel et al. (2015) that effective RPPs are able to disseminate their findings to stakeholders in ways that are accessible and help to inform their work. Future research in this area could explore how providing accessible methods for interacting with RPP research perhaps mitigates some of the common challenges that they encounter and facilitate their success, as measured by the application of research into decision-making at the practitioner level.

This study also contributes to the growing literature on research use in education. Maximizing the potential usage of research by stakeholders requires attention to how it is communicated, and the findings of this study suggest that podcasting is a promising dissemination method in service to that goal. The findings also help to reinforce the assumptions about research use put forth by Farley-Ripple et al. (2018). First, the broad participation in the podcast by educational researchers and practitioners alike suggests that there is buy-in for the assumption that there is a meaningful connection between research and practice within the RPP. Second, the approach to the podcast detailed in this study aligns with the assumption that research can be interpreted differently in different contexts. This is a key reason why RPP personnel worked to include diverse perspectives from research and practice in episodes and member checked the content prior to dissemination. Third, the findings of this study reinforce the assumption that it is important to be intentional and effortful in research dissemination to account for varying definitions of “use” by decision-makers in school districts. The podcast profiled here explores topics of interest collectively identified by the seven partnering school districts of the RPP. Episodes include perspectives from member school districts in order to not only ensure that their interests are well-represented but also to lend credibility to the research and maximize its potential use in a variety of contexts. Future research in this area should explore how much more likely stakeholders are to “use” research when it is communicated by members of their own school district or profession.

Finally, this study offers theoretical implications for the literature on podcasting as a research dissemination method. It appears research in this field primarily focuses

on how podcasts can help to promote student learning. Results of this study suggest that stakeholders who listened to the podcast learned something valuable about topics relevant to their work. This is consistent with studies suggesting that podcasts are a helpful learning tool (e.g., Bolliger et al., 2010; Hew, 2009; Merhi, 2015). However, it also extends this research by exploring how podcasts can help educational practitioners engage with and learn from research findings to inform their decision-making.

This study also contributes to a smaller body of literature exploring how podcasts specifically promote research access and readership. The findings of Thoma et al. (2018) indicate that the use of podcasts to promote research is associated with increased readership. While increases in readership were not apparent in the current study, this may be somewhat attributable to the content of the podcast episodes, which often offered synthesized findings from RPP research rather than simply promoting an article. Tying podcast episodes more explicitly to research reports to promote readership is an opportunity for the RPP profiled in this study. However, future research in this area should consider metrics other than article readership to assess the degree to which listening to a podcast promotes interacting with and understanding research. While this study did not fully address the point of advocacy in Heilesen (2010) that there should be more empirical research on the impact of podcasts on learning, it does reinforce the finding that stakeholders tend to consider this dissemination medium to be valuable. Future research in this field should work toward isolating the unique impact of podcasting on learning and research use.

Practical implications

RPPs are growing in popularity across the country, providing infrastructure for connecting university-based researchers with educational practitioners with the potential to make a meaningful impact on outcomes for local students and educators. To accomplish this, it is necessary for an RPP to disseminate its findings through methods that are accessible and have the potential to influencing decision-making. The RPP profiled in this article was established decades ago but experienced considerable recent growth over the first three years of its podcast. This included a broadening audience of engaged stakeholders, increased familiarity with the work of the RPP, and higher attendance at its annual conference. While there was not empirical evidence that these outcomes were directly caused by the inclusion of a podcast as a primary dissemination method, the concurrent growth of the podcast suggests that it may have been a meaningful driver of the RPP's development. Furthermore, comparative data between the podcast and research reports from the RPP suggest that this dissemination method offered a more nimble and accessible way for stakeholders to engage with research. This is not to suggest that research reports are not still a critical component for sharing findings. However, the flexibility for producing multiple podcast episodes throughout the course of a study—rather than sharing one research report at its conclusion—presents a clear opportunity for ongoing and meaningful engagement with an audience who may benefit from the findings.

Furthermore, the degree of representation across RPP school districts and opportunities for cross-division dialogue presented clear evidence of the potential for

building community and networks within an RPP. Survey feedback from stakeholders reflecting positively on how the podcast made them more familiar with the work of the RPP triangulated this claim, and participants reported feeling that they were fairly represented in their episodes. Considering the increasing popularity of podcasts as a method for content engagement and the evidence presented in this study, this dissemination approach offers great promise for advancing the research of RPPs to relevant audiences and, subsequently, increasing their impact.

As with any university-based research endeavor, the amount of necessary resources should be a key consideration when deciding whether to implement podcasting as a dissemination method. The aforementioned approximate annual cost of \$10,000 is based on an estimated 10percent effort by a faculty member who plans and produces the podcast (approximately 98% of the cost) as well as some small fees for hosting a podcast online. Personnel from the RPP profiled in this study have given ongoing consideration to the amount of time and resources that are reasonable to invest in its podcast. The evidence outlined in this study suggests that the podcast has served a key role in accomplishing the goals of the RPP, including regularly engaging and expanding its stakeholder base and contributing to scholarly dialogue at the local, state, and national levels. Continued growth in the popularity and perceived value of the podcast by RPP stakeholders suggests that this is a worthwhile investment, and perhaps will merit additional effort and resources in the future.

Conclusion

As a central dissemination method for the RPP profiled in this article, podcasting offered an apparently engaging and nimble vehicle for distributing information. For RPPs to be effective in their mission to inform the improvement of schools through applied research, dissemination efforts must be accessible and designed with the intended audience in mind (Penuel et al., 2015). The podcast described here appeared to provide relevant information to local public PK–12 educators through a platform that was free and readily available whenever and however it was convenient for RPP stakeholders. Furthermore, although a podcast is a nimble approach to research dissemination, the structure of this podcast demonstrated how it can be executed with an eye on rigor by incorporating ongoing processes of peer review and member checking. Educational RPPs seek to bring about positive change in schools by prioritizing the input of relevant stakeholders (Snow, 2015), generating research that is pragmatic for local needs (Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013), and thoughtfully disseminating findings to those who can benefit the most from them (Chambers & Azrin, 2013). Podcasts, such as the one featured here, can align organically with these efforts while offering the opportunity to engage additional stakeholders in the important work of RPPs, potentially expanding their influence beyond the immediate communities they serve.

Websites

Apple Podcasts, <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/apple-podcasts/id525463029>
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Spotify, www.spotify.com
Stitcher, www.stitcher.com

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Did you listen to an episode of our podcast last year? (yes or no)

(If “yes”)

As a listener, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about our podcast. If you do not have an opinion on a statement, select N/A.

(1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Agree, 4 – Strongly Agree)

- ☐ The topics covered in the podcast were relevant to my work or experiences in education.
- ☐ The guests on the podcast were interesting and engaging.
- ☐ The podcast made me more familiar with the work of [RPP].
- ☐ I learned something valuable from listening to the podcast.
- ☐ The podcast sounded clear and professionally produced.
- ☐ I would share the podcast with friends and colleagues.

(Short answer) What general comments or feedback do you have about our podcast?

Were you also a guest on the podcast last year? (yes or no)

(If “yes”)

As a guest, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about our podcast. If you do not have an opinion on a statement, select N/A

(1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Agree, 4 – Strongly Agree)

- ☐ Communication about what to expect for our episode was clear.
- ☐ My perspective was represented fairly in the episode.
- ☐ I was provided the opportunity to give feedback on my episode.
- ☐ I learned something valuable by participating in the podcast.
- ☐ I am glad that I participated in the podcast.

(Short answer) Please share any additional thoughts or feedback you have about being a guest on our podcast.